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THE BONES OF BEN JONSON

BY JOSEPH QUINCY ADAMS

We have good reason to believe that had Shakespeare desired to be buried in Westminster Abbey, the authorities there would gladly have provided for him a place in the Poets' Corner, acting in accordance with the sentiment of contemporary men of letters, thus expressed by William Bass:

Renowned Spenser, lye a thought more nye
To learned Chaucer, and, rare Beaumont, lye
A little nearer Spenser, to make roome
For Shakespeare.

But he seems to have preferred to rest among his relatives and friends in his native Stratford. His body received a conspicuous place of honor in the village church, just within the chancel rail and before the altar. It is true that by virtue of his ownership of a portion of the Stratford tithes he had a legal right to interment here; yet we can hardly doubt that his fellow-townsmen would have given him this distinction anyway, as one of England's greatest poets, and Stratford's most illustrious son. His body was not laid in a vault, but in a wooden coffin placed in the earth; and on a flagstone over the grave was carved an inscription said by tradition to have been written, or selected, by the poet himself:

Good frend, for Iesvs sake forbear
To digg the dvst enclosed heare.
Blest be the man that spares thes stones,
And evrst be he that moves my bones.

The reason for this curious inscription seems not to be generally understood, though several times clearly stated; for example, by

William Hall, a graduate of Oxford, who visited Stratford in 1694 and wrote to his friend, Edward Thwaites, the eminent Anglo-Saxon scholar, a description of the poet's burial-place. After quoting the verses on the flagstone, he observes: "The little learning these verses contain would be a very strong argument of the want of it in the author, did not they carry something in them which stands in need of a comment. There is in this church a place which they call the bone-house, a repository for all bones they dig up, which are so many that they would load a great number of wagons. The poet, being willing to preserve his bones unmoved, lays a curse upon him that moves them; and having to do with clarks and sextons, for the most part a very ignorant sort of people, he descends to the meanest of their capacitys."

The charnel-house referred to by Hall stood in the churchyard, and adjoined the chancel on the north, within a few feet of Shakespeare's grave. The frequent interment of new bodies in the church led to the constant removal of the remains of persons formerly buried there, and these remains were dumped in a miscellaneous pile in the bone-house. The custom was not confined to Stratford. Aubrey notes that Sir John Birkenhead, who was buried in St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, London, specifically ordered in his will that his body be interred in the churchyard; "his reason was because, he sayd, they removed the bodies out of the church." And Sir Thomas Browne, in *Hydriotaphia*, bitterly complains, for himself and others, of the "tragicall abomination of being knaved out of our graves." The Stratford bone-house seems to have been more than usually repulsive. A visitor to the town in 1777 writes (Defoe's *Tour*, 1778): "At the side of the chancel is a charnel-house almost filled with human bones, skulls, &c."; and Ireland in 1795 declares that it contained "the largest assemblage of human bones" he had ever seen. We may suspect that Shakespeare was recalling one of the nightmares of his boyhood when in *Romeo and Juliet* he wrote:

Or shut me nightly in a charnel-house,
O'er cover'd quite with dead men's rattling bones,
With reaky shanks, and yellow chapless skulls.

It can hardly be doubted that he had often watched the clownish sextons of the church dig up the bones from their quiet graves, and

hurl them like loggats into the adjacent charnel. His natural revulsion at the idea seems to find expression in *Hamlet*:

Ham. That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once. How the knave jowls it to the ground as if it were Cain's Jaw-bone! . . . Why does he suffer this rude knave now to knock him about the sconce with a dirty shovel? . . . Dost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion i' the earth?

Hor. E'en so.

Ham. And smelt so? pah!

Shakespeare well knew that his bones would lie perilously near to the charnel-house; and he knew also that before many years had rolled by, his place would be claimed by some later owner of the village tithes. It was specifically to avoid the "abomination of being knaved out of" his grave that he directed the verses to be cut over his body.

In this effort to provide lasting peace for his bones he was successful. Dowdall, who visited Stratford in 1693, quotes the church clerk, then above eighty years of age, to the effect that "not one" of the sextons, "for fear of the curse abovesaid, dare touch his gravestone," and this even though, as he adds, "his wife and daughters did earnestly desire to be laid in the same tomb with him." Shakespeare's daughter, Susanna, who was buried near him, suffered the very fate he sought to escape: in 1701 her bones were removed to the charnel-house, and her grave given over to a certain inconspicuous person named Watts, who happened then to be a part-owner of the Stratford tithes. But to this day the bones of the poet have been unmolested. In 1796, workmen who were employed to construct a vault next to his grave testified to the fact that the earth above his body had never been disturbed. They, indeed, in the course of their labors, accidentally dug into one side of his tomb, and opened up a small hole. Peering in, they saw nothing but a hollow space where the coffin had been; and without any further effort to pry into the secrets of the grave, they hastily walled up that side of the vault with brick.

Probably the narrowest escape the dead poet suffered was in the early part of the nineteenth century, when, says Halliwell-Phillipps, "a phalanx of trouble-tombs, lanterns and spades in hand, assembled in the chancel in the dead of night, intent on disobeying the solemn injunction that the bones of Shakespeare were not to be

disturbed. But the supplicating lines prevailed. There were some amongst the number who, at the last moment, refused to incur the warning condemnation, and so the design was happily abandoned." The church is now carefully locked and guarded, so that a recurrence of this sort of peril is no longer to be feared.

Since the body was laid not in a vault but in the ground it is probable that long ago all that was earthly of the immortal bard has been peacefully compounded with clay. And there, in all likelihood, his sacred dust will lie undisturbed until the graves yawn and yield their dead up to the last judgment. Such, we may suppose, was the poet's expressed wish.

With "rare Ben Jonson" the case is altered, for his bones have more than once been disturbed, and his skull, after being subjected to the curious scrutiny of various persons, rests to-day apart from the remainder of the skeleton.

Though his public career was identified with London, in private life he was associated with the village of Westminster, just as Shakespeare was with Stratford. He was born in Westminster, he received his early education in the Westminster School, and he spent his last years in a small house wedged in between the Abbey and the Church of St. Margaret, "the house," writes Aubrey, "under which you goe out of the churchyard into the old palace." Here, too, he died, on August 6, 1637; and three days later he was laid to rest in the great Abbey, not in the Poets' Corner, but in the north aisle of the nave. Aubrey describes his place of interment in the following terms: "He lies buried in the north aisle, in the path of square stone (the rest is lozenge), opposite to the scutcheon of Robertus de Ros, with this inscription only on him, in a pavement-square, of blew marble, about 14 inches square,

O RARE BENN IOHNSON

which was donne at the chardge of Jack Young (afterwards knighted), who walking there when the grave was covering, gave the fellow eighteen pence to cutt it."

This "pavement-square of blew marble" was removed at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the floor of the Abbey was repaved; and in its place was substituted a triangular stone, bearing the same inscription. The original stone, discovered in the office of the clerk of the works about 1846, was "let into the wall a few yards to the north of the grave, underneath the monument

of Colonel James Bringfield," where it may still be seen by the curious.

In connection with this old square stone, an interesting tradition was long handed down in the Abbey. The story is thus recorded in Cunningham's *Handbook of London*: "One day, being rallied by the Dean of Westminster about being buried in the Poets' Corner, the poet is said to have replied (we tell the story as current in the Abbey): 'I am too poor for that, and no one will lay out funeral charges upon me. No, sir, 6 feet long by 2 feet wide is too much for me: 2 feet by 2 feet will do for all I want.' 'You shall have it,' said the Dean, and thus the conversation ended." According to another version of the story, the colloquy took place with King Charles the First. In both cases the anecdote closes with the statement that in accordance with this agreement Jonson was buried "in an erect posture."

So far as I am aware, the grave of Jonson was not disturbed until the nineteenth century. In 1823, however, Lady Wilson, the wife of General Sir Robert Wilson, the distinguished soldier and Governor of Gibraltar, was interred in Westminster in a spot adjacent to the poet's place of burial; and while digging the grave, the sextons exposed the crumbling remains of "rare Ben." A vivid description of these remains is to be found in a letter by "J. C. B." published in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, September, 1823. So interesting is this forgotten letter in all its details, and so important for a history of Jonson's bones, that I print it in full.

Aug. 29.

Mr. Urban,

The absence of a friend from home, whom I was desirous of seeing, afforded me a leisure hour this morning at Westminster, which I thought I could not better employ than in visiting the interior of the sublime Abbey Church, a venerable magnificent building, in which I have passed many an hour in contemplating the architecture of its lofty ailes, and in viewing the tombs which adorn, as well as those which disfigure, their design and beauty. I had scarcely entered the usual door of admittance in Poets' Corner, when I was met by an old and particular friend, a member of the Church, with whom I had not long paced the external ailes of the choir, when the hurried step of workmen, and the unusual activity of the Vergers, announced the speedy commencement of some ceremonious spectacle, which we soon ascertained to be the Funeral of Lady Wilson, whose grave was opened in the North aile of the nave opposite the third arch from the West end.

But what followed this piece of information engaged my interest, and forms the subject of this Letter. It was no less than a brief account of the discovery of the grave of Ben Jonson, against whose narrow cell the foot of the coffin of the above lady now rests, on its Western side. This description was followed by a promise of a sight of the skeleton; and no sooner was the funeral dirge ended, and the Church cleared of the procession, than I passed with rapid step to the spot where have lain in quiet repose from the period of their deposit, namely, 1637, to the present day, the mortal remains of this distinguished Bard.

The spot of his interment is marked by a small stone, inscribed with the following laconic and well-known inscription:

"O rare Ben Jonson!"

which is repeated on his tomb in the Poets' Corner. The eccentricity of the Bard is acknowledged, and perhaps no one particular instance is better known than the agreement he is said to have made with the reigning Dean of Westminster, about the quantity of ground his body was to occupy within the Abbey after his decease. If this anecdote has gained credit, that which stated him to have been buried in an upright posture has been almost universally rejected as ridiculous and improbable; in proof of which I need only refer your readers to the Histories of Westminster Abbey by Malcolm and Brayley; the former says, the story of Jonson having been buried in a piece of ground *eighteen* inches square, arose from the size of the stone, and "from no other reason." The latter follows the same opinion, and calls it "an absurd tradition." But extraordinary and absurd as it may appear, it is nevertheless true that Ben Jonson's body occupied a space not more spacious than eighteen inches. This doubt set at rest forever, I proceed to a description of what I saw of his remains.

I have already mentioned that the foot of the new grave joined the depository of Ben Jonson, and broke into, if it did not entirely destroy, the side of it. The skeleton then appeared, and was in tolerable preservation; the skull was loose, and on the removal of the earth, the *tibia* or large bone of both of the lower legs, several ribs, and one piece of the spine, separated from their joints.

Every care was taken to prevent the workmen from breaking the skeleton more than was possibly avoidable, or of scattering the fragments which their spades accidentally removed; and so carefully were the injunctions obeyed, although the diggers were ignorant that they had exposed the crumbling remains of an eminent man, that most of the ribs, still clinging to the spine, protruded into the new grave, and were not broken off.

It is remarkable that the back is turned towards the East, and more remarkable that the corpse was buried with his head downwards, the feet being only a few inches below the pavement of the Church.

Ben Jonson was of small stature, and but for a rude interruption, I should have ascertained the exact depth of the cell which the body occupied, and some other particulars which it would have been curious and interesting to have preserved. There were a few small fragments of

wood, to show that the body had been enclosed in a coffin or box, but the proof that it was constructed of no substantial materials, and that it has long been completely destroyed, appears in the condition of the skeleton, the body of which was filled with a solid mass of earth, and the cavity where the head had reposed remained a perfect mould of its form.

Under the strongest feelings of reverence, and unawed by the curse denounced by Shakespeare, against the violators of his tomb in Stratford Church, I examined the skull and other detached bones, which were firm and perfect, and of the usual dark brown color. When first exposed, the skull was not entirely deprived of hair, but repeated disinterments in the space of a few hours, or, what is equally probable, the fingers of the curious, had not left a single thread of this natural covering for me to see.

All the bones were again buried with the most scrupulous care, the new grave was speedily closed up, and the remains of the learned Dramatist sheltered, perhaps forever, from further disturbance, or the gaze of the curious.

Yours, &c.

J. C. B.

There is, so far as I can discover, no reason to doubt the accuracy of this letter. Its general correctness is verified by subsequent examinations of the grave; while the observation, "Ben Jonson was of small stature," records a fact that could then hardly have been known to the writer except through an examination of the actual remains. That he was really "of small stature" is revealed by certain allusions in the *War of the Theatres*. Thus Thomas Dekker, in heaping personal abuse on Jonson in the comedy of *Satiromastix*, scornfully calls him a "pigmy," and makes a Welshman exclaim: "He does conspire to be more hye and tall as God a mightie made him." And in his *Poetaster*, Jonson applies to himself the adjective "little." In view of these allusions it is to be regretted that a "rude interruption" prevented our learning the "exact" height of Jonson's body.

Twenty-six years later Sir Robert Wilson died, and was buried beside his wife. At this time the geologist, William Buckland, was Dean of Westminster. When he learned that the grave was to be dug next to that of Ben Jonson, he sent his son, Francis, to watch the operation, and bring to him the skull of the poet for examination. Francis was twenty-three years old, had graduated from Oxford, and was now in his second year as a student of surgery at St. George's Hospital. A man of unusual intelligence, he was doubtless already displaying the intellectual curiosity and shrewdness of observation which later made him one of England's most

notable scientists. His straightforward narrative of how he took the skull of Jonson to the Dean of the Abbey, I quote from his *Curiosities of Natural History* (Fourth Series, p. 238) :

In the year 1849, Sir Robert Wilson, Knight, was interred in the Abbey, and the place chosen for the grave was close to a triangular stone, let into the pavement in the north aisle, on which these words were inscribed :

O RARE BEN JONSON

My father, who was then Dean, told me that Ben Jonson had, at his own request, been buried, not in the usual position, but that the coffin had been placed upright in the earth, with the feet downward.

I have forgotten the exact particulars the Dean then told me, but I have since been down to the Abbey, and find from "Mentor" (who has acted as guardian of Dean's Yard for very many years), that a local tradition exists that Ben Jonson asked the King (King Charles the First) to grant him a favour.

"What is it?" said the king.

"Give me," said Ben Jonson, "eighteen inches square of ground."

"Certainly," said the king; "but where will you have it?"

"In Westminster Abbey," replied Ben Jonson.

"Your request is granted," said the king.

Ben Jonson knew that if he had asked direct for what he really wanted he would probably have been refused; he therefore adopted the above ingenious plan of obtaining a favourable answer.

The above is (as I have said before) the local tradition. I should feel much obliged if any reader of this could tell me if it is recorded in any book; I myself have searched in vain.

When, therefore, Sir Robert Wilson was buried close to the triangular stone which marked the grave of Jonson, my father instructed me to go into the Abbey and look after the grave-diggers, in order to ascertain what I could about the above-mentioned tradition.

After a time, the men found the coffin very much decayed, which, from the appearance of the remains, must have originally been placed in the upright position. The skull found among these remains, Spice the grave-digger gave me as that of Ben Jonson, and I took it at once into the Dean's study. We examined it together, and then going into the Abbey, carefully returned it to the earth; retaining, however, a few fragments of the coffin wood.

It will be observed that Buckland does not say anything that may be taken as refuting the statement made by "J. C. B." in 1823, that the body had been buried head downward; all that he could observe was that the coffin "from the appearance of the remains, must have originally been placed in the upright position." The skull was not at the top of the grave, just under the pavement,

but was found "among" the remains, the skeleton, it seems, having for the most part collapsed since it was viewed by "J. C. B." more than a quarter of a century earlier. One might be inclined to suspect that Jonson was originally buried in the standing position with his face to the east, and that in the course of time the head, as the heaviest part of the body, had sunk to the bottom of the grave, completely turning over in the descent, and thus to a casual observer giving the impression that the body had been buried head downward with the face to the west. But "J. C. B." was not a mere "casual observer," and the details cited by him are too clear to admit of this otherwise plausible suggestion.

Once again the tomb of Jonson was destined to be opened, and his learned skull subjected to the "battery" of a sexton's spade.

Dean Buckland died in 1856. In the meanwhile his son, Francis, had made an enviable reputation for himself in the medical sciences. In 1859 he attracted national attention by rescuing from oblivion the remains of John Hunter, the eminent "founder of modern surgery," and reintering them, with proper honors, in Westminster Abbey. As luck would have it, the spot chosen by the authorities for Hunter's grave was next to that of Ben Jonson; and thus Buckland once more was provided with an opportunity of examining the poet's bones.

The reinterment of Hunter was a notable occasion, and hundreds of distinguished scientists were present. An account of the ceremony, printed in the *London Times*, March 29, 1859, contains the following sentence, with a parenthetical clause pertinent to our inquiry: "The coffin, which had been deposited in the Abbey on Saturday evening, was reinterred yesterday afternoon on the north side of the nave, between Wilkie and Ben Jonson (the skull of the latter was freely handed about)."

Alas, poor Yorick!—if this were true. Buckland, however, tells an altogether different story about the skull. I quote again from his *Curiosities of Natural History*:

John Hunter's grave, I observed, was ordered to be dug somewhere near the spot where we had deposited the skull some years [ten years] before, so I gave minute instructions to the grave-digger (the same man, Spice, that had found it before, that if he should by chance turn up Ben Jonson's skull again from the earth, he should take great care of it, and give it into my charge. In the course of his work he *did* find this skull again, and when I went down early in the morning of the day of the reinterment

of John Hunter, to examine the grave, the old man told me he had found Ben Jonson's skull. He gave it me, and I knew the skull again quite well.

A thought came across me, thus: To-morrow there will be a crowd of folks here, and it is more than likely that, seeing the inscription on Ben Jonson's triangular head-stone, they will look out for, and possibly carry off, the poor man's skull, if they can find it; so I at once dug a hole in the earth which had been dug out of the grave, and piled up under the ledge of the monument of Colonel James Bringfield close by; in this earth I hid Ben Jonson's skull safely.

When the ceremony of the reinterment of John Hunter was completed, I went out with the rest of the people; but as soon as the Abbey was clear, and the men began to fill up the grave, I went back again by a private door, and with my own hands placed Ben Jonson's skull on the top of John Hunter's coffin, and waited till the grave was nearly filled up, and there could be no possibility of removing the skull.

We are glad to know that Jonson's skull was not "freely handed about" to satisfy the vulgar curiosity of a miscellaneous crowd; and, of course, we may be grateful to Buckland for his watchful care in twice preserving the sacred relic from the danger of theft.

Yet six years later, on November 11, 1865, the following disconcerting statement, from an apparently trustworthy source, appeared in the *Times*, under the caption "The Skull of Ben Jonson":

In the course of a paper read this week by Dr. Kelburne King, president of the Hull Literary and Philosophical Society, before the members of that Society, on "The Recent Visit of the British Association to Birmingham," the Doctor, in speaking of a visit which he and Dr. Richardson, of London, had made to Shakespeare's birthplace, at Stratford-on-Avon, narrated the following curious incident: He said that a blind gentleman, who thought no one but the guide was present, mentioned that a friend of his had a relic which would be a valuable addition to the Shakespearean Museum at that place—the skull of Ben Jonson. When this friend attended the funeral of Dr. [Hunter], at Westminster Abbey, he perceived that the next grave, that of Ben Jonson, had been opened, and he could see the skeleton of the body in the coffin. He could not resist the opportunity of putting in his hand and extracting the skull, which he placed under his cloak and carried off. From a remark which the blind gentleman dropped, Dr. Richardson thought he could identify the offender, and he asked if the person's initials did not consist of certain letters. The blind gentleman was not a little startled at finding that his secret was out; he admitted the fact, but prayed that no advantage might be taken of the discovery. This was promised; but, as Dr. Richardson is an ardent admirer of the Avonian bard, he will bring the necessary pressure to bear on the possessor of the skull, so that it shall be placed in a more worthy repository than the cabinet of an obscure individual.

This newspaper article was brought to the attention of Dr. Stanley, then Dean of Westminster, who promptly sent for Buckland, and requested information about the matter. Buckland thereupon supplied the Dean with the facts as he knew them, and then, in an effort to substantiate his statements, he sought out those persons who were connected with the Abbey in his father's time. The startling result of his inquiry he records in his *Curiosities of Natural History* as follows:

Wishing to confirm my story, I inquired for Spice, the grave-digger, but found that he had been dead some time. "Mentor" told me that one Ovens was still alive, and that Ovens assisted Spice to dig the graves for both Sir R. Wilson and John Hunter. We therefore went down to see Ovens, whom I found so old that he could tell me nothing at all; in fact, the poor old man's memory was nearly gone.

I then asked for Mr. Ryde, who was clerk of the works in my father's time; and having ascertained that he had retired into private life, at once called upon him.

And now I have another story to tell about this matter. Mr. Ryde informed me candidly, and at once, that he was quite certain that *I* had never had the right skull at all, but that *he* took charge of it.

When Sir Robert Wilson was buried, in 1849, he (Ryde), in his official capacity, superintended Spice and the other grave-digger in their operations. The earth in which the grave was made was loose sand; this sand he expected had been carted into the Abbey, as it was above the natural soil of the place. As the grave was being dug, this loose sand "rippled in like a quicksand"; and in the course of the operations, Ryde himself saw the two leg-bones of Jonson fixed bolt upright in the sand, as though the body had been buried in the upright position, and the skull came rolling down among the sand, from a position above the leg-bones, to the bottom of the newly-made grave. Ryde picked up the skull and carried it to the clerk of the works' office, in the cloisters, and there locked it up till the newly-made grave was nearly filled; he then brought it back again into the Abbey, and buried it about twelve or fifteen inches under the triangular stone on which the words "O Rare Ben Jonson" are inscribed. He remarked that there was hair still on the skull, and it was of a red colour.

In 1859, when the grave was made for John Hunter, Ryde was still clerk of the works, and John Hunter was to be buried close by the side of the grave of Sir Robert Wilson. It was likely that Ben Jonson's skull would again be found. Ryde therefore kept a look out for, and found the skull under the triangular stone where he had placed it. The skull had still traces of red hair upon it. Again, for the second time, he took charge of it, and when Hunter's funeral was over, he again buried it some twelve or eighteen inches under the triangular stone, and here he says it is to be found at this moment, never, I trust, to be again disturbed. Three or four skulls (Ryde told me) were found in digging Hunter's grave, but they

were at some distance to the westward of Rare Ben Jonson's stone. All three skulls he replaced again in the graves; but both he and Spice remarked that one was missing.

This, then, was the skull in the possession of the blind gentleman's friend, as mentioned in the *Times* of Nov. 11. It must have been taken out of the Abbey at the time of Hunter's funeral. Anyhow, it is quite positive and certain that the skull in question is *not* that of "Rare Ben Jonson"; for two persons distinctly state that they took charge of it, and returned it to the earth, viz., first, Mr. Ryde, the clerk of the works, and, secondly, myself.

We may readily agree with Buckland that the stolen skull was not that of the great dramatist. But who actually took into his safe-keeping the genuine skull?

There seems to be a lie abroad somewhere, for there is no reason why the eminent Dean of the Cathedral, his son Francis, a trained man of science, Ryde, the clerk of the works, and Spice, the honest grave-digger, should work at cross-purposes. They could not have been so deeply interested in discovering and safeguarding the genuine skull—and that on two separate occasions—without becoming aware of each other's effort; and having become aware of this, there was no reason why they should not heartily co-operate in so pious and laudable an undertaking. The Dean was vested with full authority in the matter. Spice seems to have been a simple, honest fellow, on friendly and intimate terms with Buckland, and it is hard to believe that he would be guilty of twice practicing such a mean deception on him. Buckland's absolute veracity cannot be questioned. On several counts, however, we have reason to suspect the glib story of the aged clerk of the works. For our purposes, a discussion of a single point will be sufficient.

Buckland was led to credit the story told by Ryde, disconcerting though it was, for one reason only, namely that Jonson had red hair. With an easy tolerance, hard to understand in a careful man of science, he writes:

I candidly confess that, in my opinion, the skull that the clerk of the works took under his charge on both occasions, as above stated, was really the skull of Ben Jonson, and this on account of the red hair which he observed upon it. Thanks to our excellent library of the Athenæum Club, I have been enabled to get curious particulars relative to the personal appearance of Ben Jonson. In a volume, entitled "Letters written by Eminent Persons in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, and Lives of Eminent Men, by John Aubrey, Esq. The whole now just published from the originals in the Bodleian Library and Ashmolean Museum.

Longman, 1813"—I find evidence quite sufficient for any medical man to come to the conclusion that Ben Jonson's hair was in all probability of a red colour, though the fact is not stated in so many words.

All that Aubrey says, indeed, is: "He was (or rather had been) of a clear and faire skin." This is far from saying that Jonson had red hair. As every student of Jonson will immediately discern, Aubrey is referring to the well-known fact that Jonson's skin was disfigured by a scorbutic affection. Dekker, in the *Satiromastix*, has much to say about this: "Your face full of pockey-holes and pimples with your fiery inventions"; "saffron-cheeks, sun-burnt gipsie"; "ungodly face, like a rotten russet apple when 'tis bruised"; "parboyled face"; "copper-fact"; etc. And Jonson himself good-naturedly refers to his "rocky-face."

Moreover, we know beyond peradventure that Jonson's hair was black. It is so represented in his oil portraits. In his *Poetaster*, he ridicules Marston's red hair, and exclaims: "If you can change your haire, I pray, doe." Best of all, we have Jonson's own statement to the effect that his hair was dark. At the time of his death in 1637, however, it may have been more nearly white, for in a poem which he sent to Drummond, of Hawthornden, in 1619 (Drummond labels it "a picture of himselfe," and Jonson published it with the title "My Picture, Left in Scotland"), he sadly refers to his "hundred of gray haire."

Thus the very bit of evidence that led Buckland to doubt the true avouch of his own eyes, serves to convict Ryde of what we may charitably call the vainglorious boast of an old man.

The skull of "rare Ben Jonson," which Jove so crammed with brains, is now, in all likelihood, safely reposing on the velvet-covered top of the leaden coffin of the famous surgeon, John Hunter. Could the poet now return in the flesh, and take up again his once dreaded pen, he might,

Prepar'd before with canary wine,

indite a few biting epigrams on Spice and Ovens for knocking his mazzard with their dirty spades, on the "blind gentleman of Stratford" who so naïvely sought to market a spurious relic, and, above all, on Ryde for attempting to foist upon him a poll of red hair. In the absence of such verses, I may quote the simple epitaph which he penned for Charles Cavendish:

Sons, seek not me among these polished stones;
These only hide part of my flesh and bones,
Which, did they e'er so neat and proudly dwell,
Will all turn dust, and may not make me swell.
Let such as justly have outlived all praise
Trust in the tombs their careful friends do raise;
I made my Life my monument, and yours,
Than which there's no material more endures,
Nor yet inscription like it writ but that . . .
It will be matter loud enough to tell,
Not when I died, but how I Lived.—*Farewell.*

Cornell University.
